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BINPOLDA, the spearhead of the Police Force in East Timor

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The article starts by explaining that the lowest level Police Force unit in East Timor is the **Binpolda,** (Pembina Polisionil tingkat Desa), the Village-level Polisionil [this word has a more operational meaning than 'policing'] Guidance officer, whereas elsewhere, this lowest level Police Force unit is known as Babinmas (Pembina Bintara Masyarakat), the Community Guidance Officer. It then continues;

The basic task of Binpolda is to the cultivate consciousness, participation and responsibility of the village community in security and order affairs so as to improve the resilience of society against social disorders. This is done by raising the community's awareness of the law, cultivating and safeguarding community participation to strengthen **siskamling** (the area security system), and safeguard and enhance the results of development that have already been achieved.

Binpolda's guidance activities are targetted towards all members of the community, which includes both the formal and the informal leaders, all social groups, all government programmes and development achievements in the village. Binpolda's duties are indeed extremely arduous and are decisive to the success or otherwise of (achieving) social order, all the more so in dealing with a primitive and backward community such as exists in East Timor. In East Timor, not only is society backward but the various sectors of the infrastructure - geography, transportation and education - are backward as well. Not infrequently, Binpolda members must walk on foot for days to reach a village, but this is never an obstacle for the Binpolda in performing their duties in E Timor. Therefore it is no exaggeration to say that Binpolda is the Police Force's spearhead in E Timor or the frontline troops of the Police Force. Binpolda's role is of greater important, being confronted by the concept of building village social development as the base for social order and regarding the village as the base of resistance against all forms of of social disorder.

95% illiteracy

Lieutenant-Colonel Dr. Sukri Malik, the Chief of Police in East Timor recently said that the task of the Police Force in East Timor is not easy, and that there are many challenges that have to be overcome in guiding society. The challenges come not only from the fact that social-economic and educational aspects of society are still very low but also because of the feeble mental outlook of E Timor society which is a matter of grave concern.

The Police chief's analysis is well founded, and it can be proven by all the available data. No less than 95% of the people are illiterate and live at a very low social-economic level. This is the result of almost 500 years of Portuguese colonialism, whereas the Portuguese had no interest at all in bringing about the people's advancement. Feeble mentality is still very evident among the Timorese, particularly among the older generation. They

still like to spend most of their time getting drunk, gambling, cock-fighting and dancing at festivals.

This feeble mentality results in unhealthy physical and economic conditions because people's earnings from their coffee or rice harvest last only a short while, being squandered at the gambling table or on drinking. All this is an integral part of E Timor society, a condition that was indeed created in Portuguese colonial times. This represents another aspect of the task of the Police in E Timor, because they must be able to stamp out society's ills. These are the 'five-ills', the 'five M's' (molimo) known to their ancestors since time immemorial as: gambling, womanising, taking drugs (including opium and marajuana), drinking and thieving.

The Portuguese wanted to make E Timor society backward, ridden with poverty and ignorance. In those times, it was extremely difficult for the Timorese to get any schooling unless they were the children of chiefs (raja). Not only was education made difficult for the Timorese but there was also social stratification. For example, in Portuguese days, the common Timorese people were strictly prohibited from walking on asphalted roads.

These low social, economic and mental conditions are the source of many negative features because they result in extremely inappropriate thought processes and experiences. Suppressed feelings that have been bottled up for such a very long time make people extremely temperamental, very difficult indeed to control. As a result, the level of criminality, especially homicide, is very worrying indeed, as a proportion of the number of people. To take the example of Ermera District with a population of 60,000, there are on average 5 or 6 murders a year. Murders are committed sometimes for the most trivial reasons, such as for example over a mere one thousand rupiahs. Most murders are linked to magic practices or because of mutual suspicions related to lulik [the Javanese 'equivalent' of this word, given in the text is santet which means banditry].This at the same time proves just how primitive and law-blind E Timor society is, with their tendency to take the law into their own hands and the animistic beliefs that are still widespread in their society. Other crimes that sporadically occur are torture, petty theft, deception and immorality.

Obstacles confronting the Binpolda

The Binpolda have a very great role to play in building village society if this is to proceed in accord with the programmes that have been decided upon. All the more is this so in E Timor where society so greatly yearns to be guided and directed in all spheres of life. The Binpolda is therefore expected not only to become the guide for society in security and order matters and upholding the law; they must also function as teachers of society. Yet, the Binpolda confront innumerable difficulties in the performance of their duties. There are at least four obstacles in dealing with this very backward E Timor society.

The first obstacle is language. The majority of people are illiterate and can only speak the local languages, whereas there are quite a number of languages in E Timor - different ones in almost every sub-distrct. There are three main languages, Titun (sic), Mambay and Kemak. This language obstacle is very serious particularly because the vast majority of Binpolda are newcomers [ie. not Timorese] because the chances of finding local people to join the Police are very limited indeed because so few people have completed SLTP or SLTA schools. It is not easy to become a member of the Armed Forces

or the Police. In order to do so, a high level of intelligence and analytical ability is needed, particularly since the Police have the task of giving direct guidance to the community.

The second obstacle is terrain, because the mountainous nature of the region is an obstacle to Binpolda operations. Because of these geographical features, villages are located very far from each other and are very isolated, with the result that a Binpolda member often needs to walk on foot or go by horse for days in order to reach a village.

The third obstacle is the limited number of Police personnel in E Timor, with the result that there are not enough Binpolda. In other words, there is a serious shortage of Binpolda. Not infrequently, one Binpolda member is required to take charge of five or six villages. Take for example First Sergeant L.N. Benyamin who is Police Chief of the village of Fatubesi, Hatolia subdistrict in the district of Ermera; he must also function as the Binpolda, not only in Fatubesi village but also in five other villages, Lisafet, Fatubesi (sic), Fatubolu, Urahu and Maubu, and moreover, he is also the local primary school teacher, a job that he does without pay. Or, take the example of Police officer Jose Alves, the Binpolda of Lawala village in Ermera subdistrict, Ermera. He must also function as Binpolda in three other villages, Lawala, Ponilala and Hamboi.

The fourth obstacle is transportation, both the roads and the means of transport.

A Binpolda member is required to have a sensitive understanding of the situation and to have high educational qualifications. With such sensitivities, a Binpolda will be able to guide society dynamically and creatively, in line with the targets set and the aspirations of his community. Inspired by educational qualities, a Binpolda will exercise patience, show attention to detail and have the ability to cope in guiding this very heterogeneous society. The Police force in Ermera indeed has a very creative and communicative Binpolda in the person of Jose Alves, a native of the region, from Ermera town. Because of his creativity and understanding, he has succeeded in guiding society, with the result that his village was the winner in an inter-village contest at both district and provincial level. In appreciation of his successful work, Corporal Jose Alves was given a house by the Ermera District head and a horse by the Nusra police chief.

Apart from all this, every Binpolda or Bapinmas member must hold fast to one thing above all if he is to be a success in the performance of his duties: He must practise the 'three S's', senyum, sapa, simpatik, or smiling, being respectful and full of understanding. This 'smiling police' (original: Eng.), the friendly, understanding policeman who enjoys the people's love, will succeed in guiding the community well. This is because guiding the people is a process of communication whereas communication means conveying ideas or concepts for the purpose of creating uniformity.